

blm - alaska

frontiers

Issue 9 March 1988

Golden past colors Iditarod

Alaska gold stampede created demand for short winter trail

The Iditarod Trail always seems to conjure images of the sled dog race. The mushers making that perilous dash across frozen Alaska. But the Trail's importance goes beyond the race. It goes to its past.

Bob Griffis was sixty-three years old when he left Iditarod with a quarter of a million dollars in gold. The year? 1910. His transportation? Dogsled, of course. His destination? Seward.



Griffis, an employee of the Iditarod Miners and Merchants Bank, knew the score. Although some thought he would be the target of robbery, he had convinced his employer otherwise. He reasoned that harsh winter conditions would make a robbery unlikely.

Besides the guards accompanying him, Griffis also had other factors on his side. He had been a capable stagecoach



The rush to Iditarod and Ruby between 1908 and 1910 set 10,000 stampedeers in motion. Within two decades these goldfields produced \$30 million worth of gold. Here miners pose beside a small rocker and sluice box.

driver during the gold rush in the Dakotas and he was quite familiar with the trail, having run mail between Unalakleet and Nome.

It took 37 days before Griffis and his party arrived in Seward. Gold and men were safe. The improbable had become possible.

Griffis repeated this remarkable feat every year until World War I. Never would he succumb to robbery, and the gold he carried at times amounted to a million dollars.

It was people like Griffis who kept the Iditarod Trail alive during the turn of this century.

The Iditarod Trail was officially created during the winter of 1910-11 when the Road Commission cleared and marked 800 miles of trail from Nome to Kern Creek, 71 miles north of Seward.

The Alaska Road Commission had readily taken on this road project because the road would provide Nome and other mining

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Iditarod, *continued*

communities with a shorter route to the ice-free port of Seward. Gold had been discovered in Nome in 1899, and ongoing gold production in the Innoko Mining District made good winter transport of mail and supplies a necessity.

Before the trail construction could begin, a hardy fellow by the name of W.L. Goodwin inspected and surveyed the trail route and made recommendations for location of roadhouses. Goodwin worked for the Alaska Road Commission, and his 1908 report reveals what the trail was like:

"We arrived at Kaltag on March 19th, where we had the coldest weather on the trip. . . 43 degrees below zero. Here we waited for telegrams, rested the dogs and arranged to go with the mail carriers as the weather was bad and trails obliterated.

"On the 24th we made 40 miles to Unalaklik (sic) and this part especially needs attention . . . many men have suffered hardships and have been lost in storms. . ."

RITCHISON & LAWRENCE.

Kaltag General Store

ROADHOUSE AND SALOON IN CONNECTION

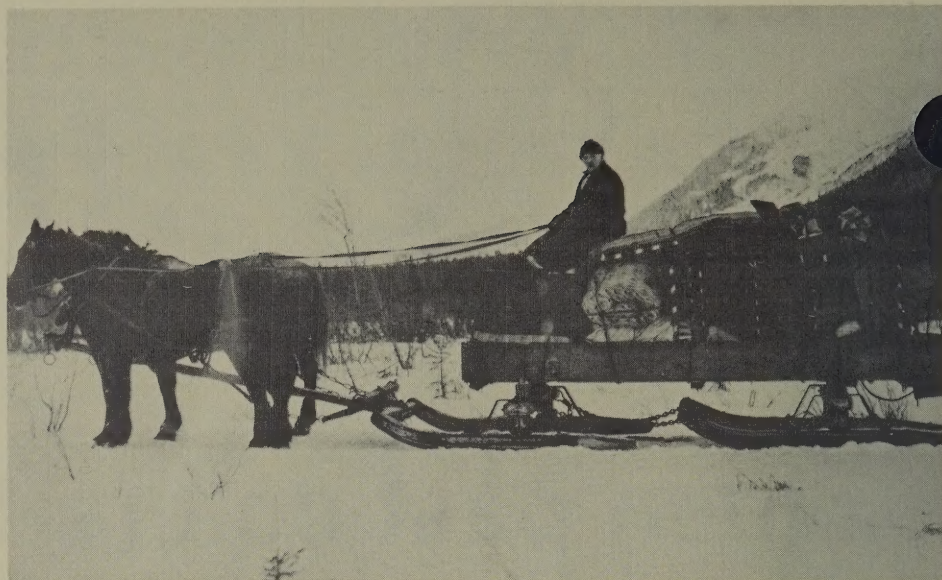
Stables for Dogs—Lots of Salmon

The only Government Trail to Iditarod and Innoko, and Shortest Starts from "Kaltag."

The reconnaissance took 66 days. Two years later, Goodwin made the trip again. This time Goodwin, nine men and six dog sled teams blazed and cleared the trail from Nome to Seward.

As the trail was being constructed, Alaska's last major gold rush was occurring in Iditarod. Subsequently, the new trail was called the Iditarod Trail, since the Iditarod Mining District had become a popular destination.

The Iditarod Trail was primarily a winter trail. Dog sleds, snowshoes and even bobsleds were used. But dog sledding proved to be the most important means of travel because of its



Above, a bobsled hauls a load of household goods along Turnagain Arm near Girdwood in 1916. Horses as well as dogs were used for freighting to the gold camps in Interior Alaska. The town of Iditarod even had a blacksmith's shop.

versatility. Dogs were used not only for transporting passengers but for hunting, trapping, and hauling freight.

S. Hall Young, a pioneer missionary, writes about dogsledding from Iditarod to Cordova.

"you are compelled to work as hard as the dogs. . . you're wending your way around trees and stumps, over hummocks, and up and down hills, along the sides of mountains. . ."

Travelers on the Trail would often stay at roadhouses, usually 20 miles apart, a day's journey. Hall wrote,

"There is no floor in the roadhouse; all the lumber has been whipsawed by hand, the furniture manufactured out of boxes and stumps, the utensils of the rudest. But the luxury of splendid meat and good sourdough bread and coffee makes us feel we have all that goes to make life desirable."

Although the Iditarod Trail was intended to shorten the winter mail route between Seward and Nome by 300 miles, for many years the mail contract continued to be carried over the longer route to Valdez through Fairbanks, down

the Yukon River, and over the Kaltag-Nome trail. Later, the winter mail contractor used the Iditarod route.

By 1923, however, the Alaska Railroad was completed and Nenana became a departure point for those going to Iditarod and Nome. The trail soon began to fall into disuse. The exodus of miners to the World War I battlefields, and the introduction of airplanes further hastened the decline of the Trail.

By 1925 when the famous serum run stole the hearts of a nation, dogsledding and the gold rush and the Iditarod Trail had become things of the past.

—DA



The BLM was designated by the Congress to coordinate management planning for the Iditarod Trail. A comprehensive management plan was signed by the Secretary of the Interior in 1986.

Recently the BLM and the State of Alaska signed a cooperative management agreement bringing three-quarters of the 2300 mile trail system under comprehensive management. The trail crosses land administered by three federal agencies, local governments and numerous private owners.

BLM-Alaska year in review

In a move to put more money into on-the-ground projects such as wildlife inventories and new campgrounds, as well as improving the processes for conveying land to the State of Alaska and Native groups, BLM instituted a major reorganization in 1986.

This end-of-the-year report will describe some of the statistics and accomplishments achieved with our streamlined organization.



On the ground

An important goal of the reorganization was to make more money available for on-the-ground work. Although programs vary from one district to another, many occur statewide, such as inventorying easements reserved under section 17(b) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. On land conveyed to date, more than 2,000 easements have now been mapped. Some 320 other land actions such as right-of-way permits and land leases were processed. Eighteen field exams and 25 reports were completed on settlement claims in the Tanana area, where the nation's last federal open-to-entry program ended in October, 1986.

Two BLM districts hired rangers last year, a first for Alaska. They have dual responsibilities: assisting people who are using BLM areas for recreation, and investigating improper use of public resources.

Continuing its program of environmental education, BLM hosted nearly two thousand students from 34 Anchorage schools during Outdoor Week at the Campbell Tract.



On the fireline

Wild fires near Delta, on Eielson Air Force Base and in the White Mountains accounted for 91,700 of the 153,585 acres burned this year in Alaska.

In the fall, 1,600 emergency fire fighters and BLM-Alaska Fire Service personnel went to California and Oregon to fight forest fires. The warehouse shipped 150,000 pounds of equipment and supplies to support them. Alaska firefighters were paid \$6 million in wages in 1987.



Where the wild things are

BLM was able to spend more money on wildlife programs. 1987 saw the completion of many fishery and wildlife inventories and studies, including:

- a fish inventory in the Fish River system on the Seward Peninsula;
- fish inventory of six lakes and 11 streams in the Kigluaik Mountains near Nome;
- wildlife inventory on the Squirrel River, a tributary of the Kobuk;
- startup of a study of subsistence use on 500,000 acres in the central Yukon area;
- peregrine falcon inventories on the Shaktoolik River, Kingmetolik Creek and in the Lime Hills region. During this inventory four new active nests were found and four man-made nesting holes were carved into cliffs. Twenty-three peregrine chicks were banded for a migration study.

A prescribed fire was conducted north of Fairbanks to improve moose habitat in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

Eagle research got off the ground as scientists found 38 nests in the Gulkana River basin and banded 28 eaglets.

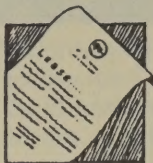
Fifty remote lakes in the Gulkana River wetlands were inventoried for fish, turning up a healthy population of lake trout.

BLM helped the Alaska Department of Fish and Game research and build a hatchery for Chinook salmon south of Paxson. If all goes well, salmon fry will be introduced into some of the lakes along the West Fork Gulkana next summer.

BLM's annual trumpeter swan survey covered 50,000 acres of wetlands in the Gulkana drainage. Seventeen cygnets were banded.

In the continuation of several Arctic wildlife projects, caribou, peregrine falcon, and grizzly bear populations were monitored; and Pacific Black brant at Teshekpuk Lake were studied in a multi-agency effort.

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Meeting a commitment

One of BLM's most important missions in Alaska is conveying land that's been granted to Alaska Natives and the state. One reorganization goal was to make it easier for members of the public to deal with BLM on land matters.

Conveyance actions are now set up geographically, and all forms of adjudication for one area are handled by one section.

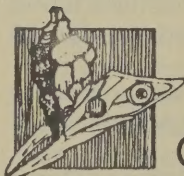
In 1987 we patented 2,197,516 acres selected by the state. To date 84.1 million acres have been patented to the state out of its 104.5 million-acre entitlement.

Orders were written revoking 15 land withdrawals, thus opening 11,700 acres of land identified as high priority for state selection.

By the end of the fiscal year, Alaska Native Corporations had received 80 percent of their entitlement under the Land Claims Act, or 35,148,924 acres. Of this, 30 million acres still must be surveyed and patented.

Last year BLM surveyed more than 1,000 Native allotment parcels, almost twice as many as the year before. The dramatic increase occurred because BLM started using its new Patent Plan Process, which coordinates the flow of work through all divisions. Ownership certificates were issued to 345 Native claimants.

Cadastral surveying also plays a vital role in transferring land. Last year all goals were exceeded for the number of townships and number of miles to be surveyed, as surveyors covered 822 miles of rectangular survey and 325 miles along the Alaska Railroad right-of-way. Contractors surveyed another 1,498 miles. In addition, 253 plats were reviewed for accuracy.



Out of the past

Last year 52 cultural sites were discovered or reported on BLM land. Among these was a rockshelter and pictograph site near Haines. More than 30 new sites were also recorded for the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District, nine in the Arctic and three historic and five prehistoric sites in the Kigluak Mountains.

Eighty reports of cultural resource exams were completed for a multiple-property nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for sites and segments of the Iditarod Trail.

And 128 additional cultural exams and other actions were performed.



In the great outdoors

Last year BLM designed and built a new campground with 25 campsites at mile 49 on the Taylor Highway, and added 12 new campsites at Tangle Lakes Campground. Maintenance work was done on 273 miles of recreation trails. BLM also surveyed the centerline for a road in the White Mountains National Recreation Area, and completed studies for an access road and campground at Jim River in the Utility Corridor. With cooperation from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, BLM drilled two new water wells at Tangle Lakes and finished designs for the reconstruction of Sourdough Campground.

Cooperative management agreements were signed for the Iditarod National Historic Trail with the City of Seward, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service and the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.



In support

BLM established a division to oversee data processing, provide improved land office services, coordinate volunteer activities and take care of other administrative duties.

The move consolidated all communications functions in the division.

In Anchorage, 8,078 Historical Indices, written summaries and histories of the land status for individual townships, were updated. The automation of 18,000 of these records is more than 50% complete.

A total of 6,963 case files were opened and 11,356 others closed.

The Alaska Resource Library circulated 10,000 books, answered 12,000 reference questions, and added 2,500 items to its collection. This library in the Anchorage Federal Building is open to the public from 8 to 5 Monday through Friday.



Under the ground

One of BLM's historic responsibilities is processing mining claims. Equally important to land management is the agency's responsibility of monitoring disturbance to surface resources during mining operations.

Last year BLM issued 17 mineral patents for 65 placer claims and adjudicated 10,000 unpatented mining claims. Mineral patent reports were completed for six claims.

Fulfilling its role in surface protection, BLM inspected 351 mining operations during the mining season.

Geologists from the state, the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Bureau of Mines produced a report for BLM estimating possibilities of silver, tin and gold deposits in the Steese National Conservation Area and the White Mountains National Recreation Area. This report is undergoing further review.

Work got under way on the environmental studies required by court order on placer mining on Birch Creek, Beaver Creek, and Fortymile River and drainages in the Minto Flats.

In the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, 17 oil and gas leases were relinquished and 10 assignments approved.

BLM continued to monitor the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System for compliance with the terms of the right-of-way grant, and in 1987 closed out the last pipeline construction camp on federal land.

A major environmental impact statement for the proposed Trans-Alaska Gas Pipeline was completed and made available for public comment. Yukon Pacific Corporation wants to build a pipeline to carry liquified natural gas from the North Slope to Valdez.

Last year BLM evaluated the oil and gas potential for more than 50 million acres of federal lands. Mineral assessments were performed on BLM lands in the Central Arctic Management Area, the Steese/White Mountains Area, and for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on several national wildlife refuges, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. and Canadian officials were briefed on the ANWR assessment.



About water

Water resources become more important as the nation's population grows. To keep tabs on Alaska's water resources, all BLM districts did snow surveys or stream gauging.

Two professional papers were published on Arctic water resources, one about water availability and the other on the radar-interpretation of lake depths.



Bouquets

Sixty percent of the flying time for BLM nationwide is done in Alaska. During fiscal year '87 Alaska BLM contracted for 11,100 hours at a cost of \$7.5 million.

Last year public-spirited volunteers at BLM donated 20,233 hours of work valued at \$232,599.

More than \$24 million in royalties either went to the U.S. Treasury or were shared with the State of Alaska in payment for 2,215,381 barrels of oil and 5,453,888 Mcf of natural gas produced on federal onshore lands.

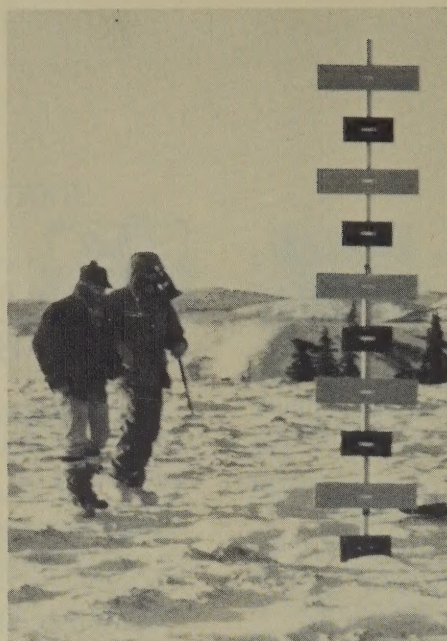
In a novel intern program, two Barrow Native high school students worked last summer at a variety of natural resource jobs in BLM's Arctic District Office. The idea was to let them sample different disciplines in the natural resource field. These ranged from archaeology to cartography.

It's easy to see from all those statistics that multiple-use management means BLM has to do many different things in many different places.

The first year of the new organization saw more wildlife and recreation projects, and increasing use of computer technology. We made it more convenient for people to deal with BLM on conveyance matters, and took on several innovative projects with other organizations.



A real snow job



BLM resource specialist Mark Phillips and fixed-wing pilot check condition of a snow marker. Cross-pieces are visible from the air.

What does Mac Wheeler mean when he says he's going out to survey the snow?

Well, he doesn't mean he's going skiing. Wheeler is a hydrologist for BLM's Anchorage District and as part of a cooperative effort with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) he conducts snow surveys in the Unalakleet Basin and Upper Kuskokwim River area. One important use for this data is to give Iditarod mushers snow-cover information well in advance of the race.

Snow surveys are conducted from January through April four times a year. In a chartered plane, Wheeler and crew hop from site to site covering more than 1,000 miles in a few days. At each of the 19 survey sites, or "snow courses," five samples are taken and measured for depth, weight and water content. Then using these figures they derive the overall density of the snow samples.

Snow depth is measured by 10-foot-high rods with red and black markers.

"These brightly painted markers come in handy when it's impossible to land near one," says Wheeler, "so we just fly in low for a reading."

Once all the data is recorded it is carefully examined and compared to previous information from each site. Then it is combined with data from other sources and published by the United States Soil Conservation Service.

"we are able to warn residents well in advance of a flood"

In addition to helping Iditarod mushers, snow survey information is used in predicting caribou and moose migrations and in forecasting the severity of flooding in small villages along the Kuskokwim River.

"By measuring the water content and density of the snow near the villages," Wheeler says, "we are able to warn residents well in advance of a flood, which gives them time to save their belongings."

Tests are also done before BLM allows logging or oil operations to take place, to keep damage to a minimum. "If there isn't any snow or ice on the ground, dragging fallen trees around or operating heavy oil transport vehicles can make quite a mess of the surrounding environment," says Wheeler, "so we go up and do a snow survey before any permits are given."

The BLM and the Soil Conservation Service are not alone in snow-surveying Alaska; other agencies and private individuals also collect information.

"Future testing will include measuring the radiation content as well," Wheeler added. "In the wake of the Chernobyl disaster these tests may reveal how critical it is to monitor atmospheric fallout, radioactive or otherwise."

—KH

New trail cut in White Mtns.



Skiers, dogmushers and snowmachiners can now enjoy a new trail connecting two BLM cabins in the White Mountains National Recreation Area, north of Fairbanks.

The trail is a shortcut between the White Mountains Winter Trail and the Trail Creek Trail. It creates the first loop route in the recreation area. Snowmachiners can make the trip in one day. Skiers and dogmushers can make it in three days. The trail connects Moose Creek Cabin to the Wickersham Creek trail shelter on the White Mountains Winter Trail. Now cleared of brush and fallen

trees, the trail is marked by orange flagging on trees every 100 feet. In areas where trees are farther apart, reflective markers have been tacked to the trees.

Once the trail is used and packed down, the flagging may not be necessary. The recreation staff plans to travel the route after each snowfall to assure that the trail is cleared and packed.

Temperatures in the area can be as much as 25 degrees colder than in Fairbanks. The snow depth is considerably greater. A sleeping bag, extra clothing, extra food, a source of heat and shelter, topographic maps, and spare machine or equipment parts should be carried.

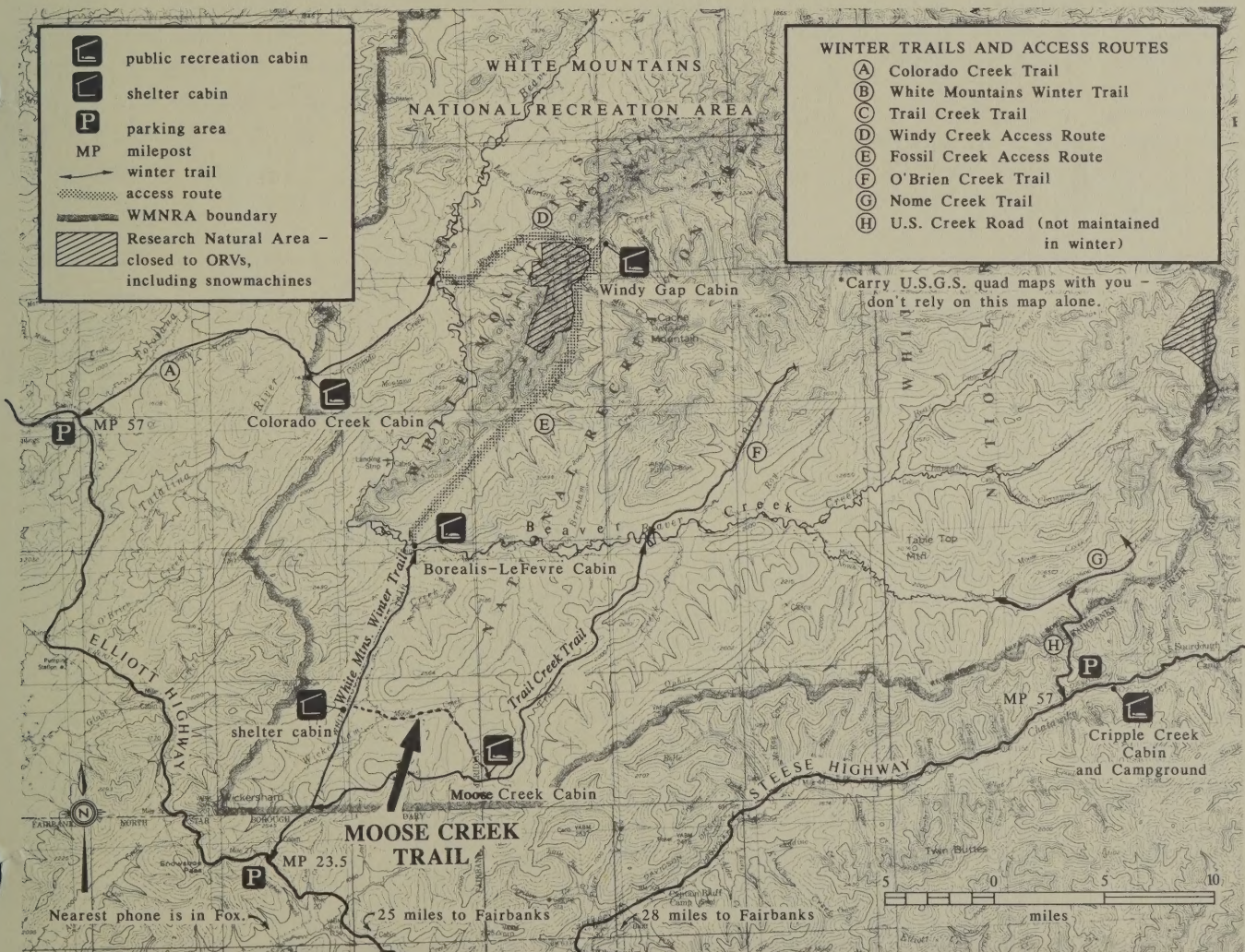
Moose Creek Cabin (formerly called Trail Creek Cabin) is 12 miles from the Elliott Highway via the White Mountains winter trail, then

Trail Creek Trail. It sleeps four people comfortably, and has cooking and heating stoves. Must be reserved at \$15 per night, limit of three consecutive nights. To reserve, call Fairbanks BLM, (907) 356-5345.

Wickersham Creek trail shelter, on White Mountains Winter Trail eight miles from Elliott Highway, is 8-by-10 and fully enclosed, with wood stove and bunkbed. It may be used by anyone in need of shelter, with no reservation or fee, on a first-come first-served basis.

This one-million-acre recreation area, reserved by Congress in 1980, is developing into a much-needed playground where people can enjoy the long winter hours of northern Alaska.

—SDW



Public comments have now been analyzed for the draft **Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan** which will provide management direction for 4.8 million acres of BLM-managed land in northcentral Alaska.

Public meetings were held in seven towns and villages of northern Alaska and Anchorage.

Although 70 percent of the respondents did not indicate an alternative preference, more than 20 percent favored modification of the preferred alternative.

Half of the people who responded did not comment on the possibility of state selection of lands in the corridor. Forty-one percent opposed state selection, but many found land exchanges acceptable.

Public comments are being analyzed for an EIS on the proposed **Trans-Alaska Gasline System**. Project Manager Jules Tileston said, "No serious objections were raised." The final EIS will be released in early March, and final action on the proposed right-of-way is expected to be completed some time this spring.

"BLM's **environmental impact statements on placer mining** are right on schedule," says Project Manager Dick Dworsky. He expects the draft EIS's to be available in early April."

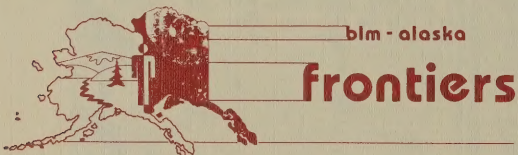
Anyone who would like to receive a copy can write to: 3809 EIS Team, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 701 C Street, Box 13, Anchorage AK 99513, phone (907) 271-3114.

How the BLM can manage and develop public uses on the Campbell Tract will be addressed at **public scoping meetings** March 2 and 3. The Campbell Tract is a 730-acre BLM administrative site located at the foot of the Chugach Mountains in mid-town Anchorage.

BLM allows compatible public uses on the site which do not conflict with its administrative uses. The meetings will be held at BLM's Anchorage District Office, 6881 Abbott Loop Road from 1-4 p.m and 6-9 p.m. on both days. For more information call 267-1225.

Scoping meetings and a comment period held last August helped the public identify concerns and issues to be analyzed for management plans on **Fort Wainwright's Yukon Maneuver Area** near Fairbanks and **Fort Greely's Maneuver Area and Air Drop Zone** near Delta Junction. Alternatives will emphasize either economic development, military uses, habitat protection (Fort Greely only) or recreation. The joint BLM-Army steering committee will consider these and a no action alternative. The alternatives and their analysis will be available for public comment when draft RMP's and EIS's are released in September. The plans should be finalized by late 1989.

What else do you want to know about BLM? We welcome your suggestions and comments. Just call BLM Public Affairs office at 271-5555 or drop us a note.
—the editor



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